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ABSTRACT

In a very brief response to "A Nation at Risk," the final report by the National Commission on Excellence in America, the author states that Americans have been charged with the task of restoring excellence to education in this country. Change and reform must stem from local, state, and federal levels. In addition, partnerships between business and schools should be enccuraged to ensure that students will be successful when they enter the work force. (BJD)

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Opening Remarks by Senator Dan Quayle

December 6, 1983

National Forum on Excellence in Education

Indianapolis, IN

Let me begin by welcoming you all to Indiana for this notable occasion - the convening of the National Forum on Excellence in Education.

I am very pleased that Indianapolis was selected as the site for the national meeting, for I know that Indiana's colleges, schools and children will be the direct beneficiaries of this meeting of education experts.

I'd also like to commend President Reagan, Secretary of Education Bell and the National Commission on Excellence in Education's members for taking a leadershiop role in focusing attention on the condition of education in America today. Certainly we owe them our gratitude for their efforts in developing recommendations to improve our children's education and for bringing together this diverse group of federal, state and local educators and legislators to try and find ways to implement eduational reform.

The findings in "A Nation At Risk," the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, disturbed many people. Americans have been used to an educational system that historically has been the best in the world. We have become accustomed' training the world's mathematicians, educators, scientists, engineers, doctors and indeed the political leaders of many nations. We have been used to our children being given a solid grounding in the basics to prepare them for anything. We have taken for granted this excellent educational system and, over the years, have let it become mediocre through indifference. "A Nation At Risk" has charged Americans with the task of restoring excellence to education in America.

"A Nation At Risk" also has serious implications for our children and our nation in terms of national security, productivity and international commerce. If we don't act quickly to restore the quality in our educational system, we will be at a distinct disadvantage with other countries.

How can we be expected to be a productive nation when 23 million Americans are functionally illiterate, and many more lack the basic cognitive skills to be quickly retrained? How can we maintain our competitive edge in engineering and computer technology when college remedial math courses have increased 72%, and science achievement scores of 17 year olds have declined steadily since 1969? How can American businesses be expected to expand into necessary international markets if we aren't teaching our prospective businessmen how to speak other languages and understand other cultures? How can we protect our country when the Armed Forces tell us they must offer remedial courses at the ninth grade level in reading to one quarter of their recruits before they can even begin to learn how to operate the complex technological equipment on which our national security and military depend? How can we begin to say that we are the best and brightest in the world when international comparisons of student achievement show Americans were never first or second and placed last seven out of nineteen times?

Change and reform must come from individuals at all levels. Local school districts must continue to have the flexibility to design programs to meet the needs of their unique populations. In this area, the federal government can help by providing leadership but at the same time giving local education agencies more control over the use of federal dollars. This Forum is a good example of how federal leadership has resulted in action at the state and local levels to strengthen education.

At the Federal level, in the coming year, Congress will be reviewing and considering several major pieces of legislation, the Higher Education Act, The Vocational Education Act and the Math and Science bill. The last, the Math and Science bill, includes significant funds for upgrading the pedagogical skills and content knowledge of elementary and secondary math and science school teachers and funds to encourage more students to become math and science teachers.

Also, the Senate bill would provide funds to encourage partrerships between the private sector and schools and colleges to improve engineering, math and science teaching, something we very much need to encourage to ensure our students are learning what will help them most when they enter the working world. Only by encouraging the academic and business communities to work together to prepare our students can we ensure our future as a productive nation. These partnerships between business and schools are also essential to the success of the vocational education programs. Education must know what business needs to keep our economy strong and I will be working on this partnership in vocational education during the reauthorization of that bill.

Education is at a crossroads. We face continued mediocrity or a reemergence of superiority. I call upon all of you to achieve this superiority that has always been characteristic of America's schools. Our children deserve no less.

In closing, let me thank Secretary Bell for holding the National Forum here in Indiana. I am pleased to be a part of it, and I look forward to some very productive and stimulating meetings.